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SUBJECT: TAIWAN CLAIMS VENEZUELA AND CUBA SUPPORTING
LEFTIST GROUPS IN NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

1. (C) Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) officials assert, based on information from Central American leaders, that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Cuban President Fidel Castro are covertly funding opposition parties in El Salvador and Nicaragua in hopes of replacing pro-USG administrations with leftist governments. MOFA Latin America Director-General Jaison Ko confidentially told AIT that during Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's September visit to Central America, Honduran President Ricardo Maduro reported to Taiwan officials that Chavez is using Cuba's intelligence network to fund Sandinista presidential candidate Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) opposition party in El Salvador. Ko said that in addition to President Maduro's information, El Salvador's former President Flores separately told Taiwan officials that Chavez and Castro were cooperating in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

2. (C) Ko told AIT that Taiwan is very concerned that Sandinista and FMLN candidates will be elected president because they are more sympathetic to the PRC and would likely switch diplomatic relations from Taipei to Beijing. Ko said that Taiwan's primary concern is Nicaragua because the presidential election will take place in 2006 while the election in El Salvador will not occur until 2008. Nicaragua's Ambassador in Taiwan Luis Wong told AIT that the pro-PRC Sandinista party has been gaining clout and could very well win next year's election. He added that if they do win, it is likely that they will switch ties to the PRC. (Note: The previous Sandinista government recognized Beijing from 1985-1990. End note).

3. (C) Ko noted that according to President Maduro and former President Flores, high oil prices have enhanced the clout in the region of Chavez, who has increased the flow of money and support to anti-USG groups. Ko said that Chavez is also providing "friendship" oil at 50-60 percent of the market price to the Dominican Republic, another of Taiwan's diplomatic partners. Ko said that Dominican Republic President Fernandez is close to Chavez, who Ko maintains is using the cheap oil to pressure Santo Domingo's ties to Taipei. Ko also noted that Chavez is funding leftist political parties in Bolivia.

4. (C) Comment: We do not know how original or valid these observations are. For its part, Taiwan considers Central America and the Caribbean to be its most important diplomatic region and actively monitors any political movements or activities (such as by Venezuela and Cuba) that could jeopardize its diplomatic relationships and give the PRC the advantage. While Taiwan does have an agenda in Central America and is seeking closer ties with the USG, Taipei is well positioned to glean information that is of interest to Washington. AIT will continue to discuss such topics with Taipei and report any information that is provided during subsequent meetings with Taiwan officials though it is impossible for AIT to assess their accuracy. End comment.
PAAL